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WAITING FOR A BETTER MOMENT:  
REVISING IRAQI GRAND STRATEGY

LCOL Ahmed Tariq-Hassan  
11 January 91

Translated by CDR George Dom  
Seminar N  
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11 January 91

From: LCOL Ahmed Tariq-Hassan  
To: President Saddam Hussein

Subj: A REASSESSMENT OF IRAQI GRAND STRATEGY

"...the object of any war can vary just as much as its political purpose and its actual circumstances." (On War, 90)

"...the original political objects can greatly alter during the course of the war and may finally change entirely since they are *influenced by events and their probable consequences* " (On War, 92).

#### INTRODUCTION

Based on world developments since August, a reevaluation of Iraqi diplomatic and military strategies are in order. The US response to Iraqi annexation and occupation of Kuwait has profoundly exceeded predictions. Despite Ambassador Glaspie's comment that "the US takes no side in the border dispute with Kuwait" (Economist, 29 Sep 90), the US has taken dramatic and unprecedented steps in the movement of forces and consolidation of world public opinion in condemnation of Iraq. US/coalition force levels are being increased daily in order to achieve a decisive, offensive force to drive Iraq out of Kuwait. The United Nations has sanctioned the use of force, and the US Congress will soon follow. Iraqi strategy must focus on the vulnerable center-of-gravity of US/coalition public opinion instead of their formidable military strength. Only by playing for time and frustrating President Bush's desire for military action, can Iraq achieve its long-term objectives.

#### BACKGROUND

As the Iraqi representative to the US National War College Class of 1991-92, I have been studying the writings of Carl Von Clausewitz. Read, and mis-read, by strategists for many years, he

was unfairly blamed for the mindless carnage of WWI trench warfare. His famous book, On War, contains profound descriptions of war's character and its use as an instrument of policy. Applicable today, Clausewitz subordinates military means to political ends. He recommends the formulation of strategy by identifying an enemy's center-of-gravity: "the hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends. That is the point against which all of our energies should be directed." (On War, 595). .

#### ASSUMPTIONS

"From the enemy's character, from his institutions, the state of his affairs and his general situation, each side, using the laws of probability, forms an estimate of its opponent's likely course and acts accordingly." (On War, 80)

1. In November 90, US policy underwent a fundamental transformation. When President Bush directed a massive increase in troop deployment it changed from one of deterrence to compellence. (O'Neill / Kass, 223). No longer was a defensive force satisfactory. The US is prepared to conduct decisive, overwhelming offensive actions.

2. The US government is committed to using military force. While some Iraqi officials feel that the US suffers from a malaise of indecision and weakness in foreign military actions ("the Vietnam Syndrome"), recent evidence is contradictory. Bombing Libya, escorting Kuwaiti tankers, attacking Iranian naval units, and invading Panama are evidence of this administration's inclination to view military power as "the continuation of policy by other means." (On War, 87). While US public opinion may not support a prolonged campaign, the unprecedented logistical effort of airlifting and sealifting hundreds of thousands of personnel and equipment speaks clearly of President Bush's resolve to use force.

3. Military action would not be limited to Kuwait. If US/coalition military action is initiated, air strikes would not

be limited to targets in Kuwait only. USAF doctrine specifically addresses strategic strikes against crucial enemy warfighting facilities. Senior military and governmental officials have clearly described the extensive, round-the-clock nature of planned US/coalition air strikes throughout Iraq and Kuwait. Enjoying a 2.5:1 numerical superiority in air power, the first phase is to consist of precision strikes against strategic targets -- including those in Baghdad -- using F-117's, F-15E's, and Tomahawk cruise missiles. The second phase will target supply lines into Kuwait, and the third will seek significant destruction of Iraqi armored forces and artillery. The final phase will be a combined arms assault -- to include an amphibious landing -- and planned liberation of Kuwait (NY Times, 9, 10 Jan).

4. Despite UN and anticipated congressional approval of military action as a last resort, US public opinion is evenly split, and indicates a preference for a negotiated solution (NY Times, 9 Jan). During congressional testimony, two former Chairmen of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated restraint. This desire for negotiation is the basis for a revised strategy.

#### US/COALITION OBJECTIVES

1. Enforcement of UN Resolutions.
2. Remove Iraqi forces from Kuwait.
3. Restore the legitimate government of Kuwait.
4. Destroy Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.
5. Preserve the safety of American lives overseas.

#### ASSESSMENT OF US STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES

"...But we should at once distinguish between three things, three broad objectives, which between them cover everything: the armed forces, the country, and the enemy's will. " (On War, 90)

US military: The largest and most rapid mobilization of forces since WWII. Dramatic increases in defense spending in the 1980's has resulted in a force of unrivaled capability and readiness. Large investments in technology and realistic training

have paid off. Inter-service frictions exist, but the joint nature of the unified Central Command under GEN Schwarzkopf seems to be effective.

US government: While the US Congress appears divided on granting President Bush the authorization to commit US forces to military action, the president has indicated no hesitation toward using force in a decisive manner.

US public: As previously discussed, the US public is evenly divided on the use of military force to support Kuwait.

US strengths:

1. Size and capabilities of armed forces, especially the application of low-observable, night vision, electronic warfare, intelligence-gathering, and "smart weapon" technologies.

2. Realistic training and exercises at all levels has maximized readiness in the absence of recent sustained combat operations. While there is no substitute for the experience of battle-hardened forces, that experience is only valuable if it is relevant. A war against highly-maneuverable US forces in 1991 will bear little resemblance to a 1980's trench war against Iran.

3. Saudi Arabian military infrastructure and port facilities are ideal for disembarking and resupplying large numbers of USAF, USA, and USMC forces.

4. The last five months have provided adequate time for overcoming logistical challenges and building a decisive offensive capability. Intensive training and rehearsals have been conducted to acclimate US forces to the desert environment and solve inter-service coordination problems.

5. The economic embargo severely restricts Iraq's ability to supply its forces and populace.

6. The support of world opinion -- including prominent Arab nations -- enhances the preservation of the economic embargo, instills the US/coalition with moral resolve, and isolates Iraq politically and militarily.

7. The demise of the Cold War provides the US with much

greater diplomatic and military flexibility.

US weaknesses:

1. The US economic recession is beginning to be voiced as a serious US domestic concern. With unemployment rising, and commercial competitiveness with Japan falling, there is an increase in an "America first" attitude that may be exploitable if the current situation can be prolonged.

2. The Vietnam experience still exerts a powerful influence on US political and military deliberations. Government and military leaders routinely remind the public that they are resolute in their commitment to avoiding a recurrence. Clearly defined political aims, measurable military objectives, public support, and a plan to win decisively are required.

3. As the current crisis does not threaten actual US survival, the American public seems to require that US objectives and military actions be endorsed by the UN Security Council, and financial burdens shared as equally as possible. The absence of an automatic Soviet UN veto makes this possible. However, this requirement also provides Iraqi diplomatic opportunities beyond the US's absolute control, and places the crisis on a multi-lateral stage with many disparate actors. France, the European Community, the UN Secretary General, the Soviet Union, and a former Japanese prime minister have all made proposals for a peaceful resolution.

4. Once recalled, redeployment of US forces to Saudi Arabia will be very difficult. It has taken a monumental effort -- both domestically and internationally -- to accomplish "Desert Shield." American and Saudi public opinion will be resistant to finance and approve a Desert Shield II. Additionally, next year the US will enter the chaotic period of a presidential election season. Iraqi patience and short-term sacrifice will pay long-term benefits.

5. Time is working against the US. The size of the deployed forces has grown beyond one that is indefinitely sustainable. Many US personnel have already been in Saudi Arabia for over five

months. Reserve forces have been recalled from civilian employment, mobilized, and deployed. It would be impractical for the US to consider a long-term presence of offensive-sized forces, which would require personnel rotations and depot-level scheduled maintenance of equipment. Preserving the coalition against Iraq requires daily effort. Time is on the Iraqi side; any additional delay in hostilities has negative repercussions in US public support and coalition integrity.

"If two parties have prepared for war, some motive of hostility must have brought them to that point.... Only one consideration can restrain it: a *desire to wait for a better moment before acting.* " (On War, 82)

Clearly "a desire to wait for a better moment" explains the US/coalition military build-up of the past six months. Already they exceed Iraqi military capabilities in every category except numbers of tanks and artillery, and they will approach parity in the next month. Facing such an unexpected force and resolved world opinion, it is now in Iraq's vital interest to "wait for a better moment."

#### PROPOSED IRAQI GRAND STRATEGY

"It is possible to increase the likelihood of success without defeating the enemy's forces. I refer to operations that have *direct political repercussions*, that are designed in the first place to disrupt the opposing alliance, or to paralyze it, that gain us new allies, favorably affect the political scene, etc. If such operations are possible it is obvious that they can greatly improve our prospects and that they can form a much shorter route to the goal than the destruction of opposing armies." (On War, 93)

When the Iraqi political objective was to annex Kuwait, the military strategy of invasion and occupation was an appropriate last resort. Now that the political and military situation has been dramatically altered, and occupying Kuwait puts vital national interests at great risk, a revision of military and diplomatic instruments is in order.



#### IRAQI POLITICAL OBJECTIVES

"The political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose" (On War, 87).

1. Preserve Saddam Hussein's position as ruler of Iraq.
2. Ensure Iraq remains the largest military force in the region.
3. Receive financial support and debt relief from Kuwait.
4. Obtain agreements from Kuwait and UAE to honor OPEC production quotas.
5. Remove United Nations economic sanctions.
6. Increase Saddam Hussein's prestige as the leader of the Arab world.

The most vulnerable US/coalition center-of-gravity is public opinion, and its requirement that military action only be taken as a last resort. If Iraq were to accept one of many peace proposals, and commence a withdrawal from Kuwait, President Bush would be forced to refrain from attacking. By trading land for time, Iraq can avoid extensive damage to its physical infrastructure and decimation of its military forces. Today's reality is that a noble "victory" over western forces would cause huge losses and Saddam Hussein's regime would face serious post-war internal and external threats at a great disadvantage.

While the best peace proposal to accept must be based on Iraqi interests, the Soviet proposal would provide Iraq a politically powerful "friend in court." President Gorbachev is currently being strongly criticized by conservative hard-liners for abandoning an ally and deferring too much to US leaders. He can improve his domestic support and enhance his stature as a world statesman by promoting a negotiated settlement. Certainly US domination of the UN Security Council will be obstructed.

Iraqi Military Strategy:

1. Conduct a strategic withdrawal from Kuwait. Deploy Republican Guard armor and artillery in defensive positions in the disputed border area of the al-Rumaila oil field.
2. Be prepared for a defensive war against US/coalition. Keep all forces on full alert.
3. In the event of hostilities, seek every opportunity to seize the initiative. Conduct attacks against US/coalition and Israeli facilities using missile and aircraft assets.

Iraqi Diplomatic Strategy

1. Contact representatives of Soviet, French, EC Ministers, and UN Secretary-General delegations to consider their peace proposals. Agenda items should include lifting of UN sanctions and embargo, mediation of Al-Rumaila border dispute, ownership of Bubiyan and Warba islands, and establishment of UN-sanctioned Arab-Israeli peace negotiations.
2. Deny US/coalition offensive military action by announcing Iraqi withdrawal commencing prior to 15 January deadline.
3. Justify Iraqi withdrawal as a demonstration of Saddam Hussein's selfless commitment to peace, and willingness to sacrifice Iraqi short-term interests in order to achieve the greater good of an Arab-Israeli peace accord.
4. Announce the initiation of investigations and prosecution of Iraqis who committed crimes against Kuwaiti citizens.
5. Send envoys to Riyadh, Cairo, and Amman. Solicit support for Arab/OPEC mediation regarding compensation from Kuwait and UAE for unauthorized oil revenues.

CONCLUSION / TAKING THE LONG-VIEW

"Lastly, even the ultimate outcome of a war is not always to be regarded as final. The defeated state often considers the outcome merely as a transitory evil, for which a remedy may still be found in political conditions at some later date." (On War, 80)

While the build-up of US/coalition military forces in Saudi

Arabia demands a major shift in strategy; with patience, favorable political objectives are attainable. The economic recession among western industrialized countries will dampen their impulse for costly military adventures into the next decade. Nations and corporations, struggling for export sales, will look favorably on Iraqi purchases, as will Eastern Europeans and Soviets in demand of hard currency. The demise of a Cold War bi-polar world will provide all participants greater freedom of action. With a strong military and renewed economic vitality, Saddam Hussein can seize the initiative to greatly expand Iraq's sphere of influence: championing the Arab-Israeli peace talks, improving relations with the European Community, and looking for opportunities in the inevitable political changes to the Soviet Union. President Bush recently said that today dawns "a new world order." Allah willing, he is right.

Endnotes:

1. Clausewitz, Carl Von, On War, edit. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton Univ Press, Princeton, NJ, 1976.
2. The Economist, 29 Sep 90: "Kuwait: How the West Blundered."
3. O'Neill, Bard E. and Kass, Ilana, COMPARATIVE STRATEGY, Vol. 11, No. 2, 1992, pp. 213-240, Taylor and Francis Group, United Kingdom.